

# THE BROKEN COIN

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## FOURTEENTH INSTALLMENT

### SYNOPSIS.

Kitty Gray, newspaper woman, finds in a curio shop half of a broken coin, the mutilated inscription on which arouses her curiosity and leads her, at the order of her managing editor, to go to the principal of Gretzhoffen to piece out the story suggested by the inscription. She is followed, and on arrival in Gretzhoffen her adventures while chasing the secret of the broken coin begin.

### CHAPTER LV.

#### The Last Arbitrament.

The call to arms was as music to Count Frederick's ears. Leaving his idle, addled king steeped in his follies, he hurried to the front.

The army was ready enough to put itself under his control; recognized him as the one ruler in all the realm. His quick orders, supplementing the arrangements of the day before, soon set all events in train. It had been his plan to mask his men deep within the town; and, as has been said, the jaws of the trap now were sprung.

The charge of the forces of King Cortislaw was met by the counter-charge of the Gretzhoffen army. Frederick's forces sprang forward with the enthusiasm of troops long in leash, and swept back the invaders. For a few moments the two lines writhed here and there in deadly embrace, as two well-matched wrestlers, neither having the advantage. Men fell. The air was filled with the smoke of conflict, the din of fighting, the rattle of small arms, the detonation of field pieces—all the horrid accompaniments of modern war.

Deep within the palace Kitty had forgotten her errand in the greater import of these sudden events. The coin had done all this—it was indeed a thing of omen, a thing of destiny.

But another, and yet a keener interest put even these emotions into the background. Count Frederick—this man whose words of regard, of remorse, of something far tenderer, still sounded in her ears. Her heart followed him; yes, at last she was ready to admit that to herself.

She peered from the palace windows here and there, seeking to gain some knowledge of the fray. Now and then a wounded man limped back. Others came, carried by the litter-bearers of the palace. Defeat was at hand for the defenders of the palace.

"Is there no hope, then?" she demanded of one of the high officials of the household. "Where are our reserves? See, our men can hold them no longer—they must have help or all is lost."

The official, thus adjured, pulled himself together for a moment of thought.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "there is a regiment held in reserve back of the palace, toward the water front."

"Then summon them at once!" exclaimed the young woman.

"By what orders, excellency?"

"By orders of Count Frederick himself! I transmit them to you. Get word to their commander at once. Let them advance."

Presently the retreating troops heard the sound of bugles, the clatter of hoofs from the opposite direction, saw the advance of the Gretzhoffen reserves so badly needed. They swept on now to the front, rallying their retreating men. The leader of the reserves looked around for the commander of the battle; instead he saw the figure of a young girl flash down the palace steps and hurry toward them.

"Yonder!" she cried. "He is at the front, supporting their full attack."

It was time now for the reserves, that was sure. Close to his own thinning front line, Frederick sat, from his saddle scanning the work of a battery hidden somewhere back of the advance of the Gretzhoffen troops, which was raining ruin on his own men. It was hidden somewhere, he could not tell where, although he swept the line beyond with the glasses time after time.

At last he found it, marked it by the smoke belched from a screen of green—green branches lashed to the frames of guns.

Count Frederick called an officer to him. "We must take that battery," he said. "If we don't, in five minutes we will be gone."

Meantime Sachio, himself bold leader of armed men, albeit self-seeking courtier, openly exulted at what seemed to him the quick success of his country's arms. He held on, directly under the eye of Cortislaw himself, and no unskilled soldier he now showed himself to be.

"In five minutes, your majesty," said he, "we will have broken their front. There will remain nothing but for us to advance."

His eye, skilled in observation in such scenes, caught sight of the mounted figure of Count Frederick, leader of the Gretzhoffen army. He recognized him in the distance—and quickly sent orders to the officer of the battery. Whether or not it was due to this slight change of aim, the next salvo from the hidden guns accomplished that which Sachio most desired. Sachio turned his glasses once more upon the spot where his enemy had sat. His horse was down, blown to pieces by the explosion of a shell, and the tall figure of Frederick himself lay prone!

"Now, forward, men!" cried Sachio. "They have broken! They will run! At them with the bayonet! Charge!"

The Gretzhoffen troops swept forward. Man to man, now, the ultimate issue must be determined. It was at this moment that, coming on at a gallop from the protection of the palace grounds, the reserve regiment deployed into action in regimental front, the leader cheering his men on to the charge. They met the advancing infantry of Gretzhoffen, many of them with their rifles unloaded, depending upon the bayonet—met them, and rode them down. The line of the assault, surprised by this new resistance, recoiled and turned.

Kitty had pressed forward behind the column which now pushed back the advance of the enemy. The plan of Count Frederick was completed. But as to Count Frederick, where was he? She found him at last, surrounded by a little group of his men who supported him as he lay.

"What do you here, mademoiselle?" said he. "Retire at once. This is no place for you."

"You are alive! You will recover!" Kitty Gray was on her knees beside him.

Frederick essayed to rise, but fell back for a moment. "Give me a moment's time," said he. "I am not hurt. The shell came close, but my horse saved me. I suppose I am but slightly wounded. I think it was the shock of the explosion. I was dazed for an instant. Where are my men? Come, let me up!"

"Your men are on ahead, Count Frederick," re-

plied Kitty Gray; "too far for you to catch them up now. Come, you must rest. Come with me."

"With you, mademoiselle?" she heard him say. He staggered to his feet.

But now—and her woman's heart, admiring ever the strong and resolute, rejoiced to see it—Count Frederick's gaze was turned not to her but toward the front where the fighting lay.

"My men," said he. "Look at them—the royal reserves! Who brought them on? We have won! They are broken. The battle is ours, after all!"

### CHAPTER LV.

#### Roleau, the Spy.

In all these rapid events of the last few hours Roleau had been left quite to his own resources. His mistress had slipped away from him without his knowledge. Count Frederick was gone, he knew not where. He guessed rather than knew that each of them might be seeking the other. That meant, according to his reasoning, that they must be at or near the royal palace. It was thither Roleau at length turned his own footsteps.

Discovered at last through the notice attracted by his lack of uniform, he was halted by an officer, who brought him forthwith to the commander of the army, none less than Sachio, who sat close to the king, watching the progress of the battle.

"General," said the officer to Sachio, "here is a man who was trying to get through our lines. What shall we do with him? We think perhaps he is a spy."

"So, fellow, you are here again?" he said, grimly. "I know you, yes, well enough. We have met more than once before now. I recall you at my lodging, and elsewhere. What do you here? Where is she, your mistress, the young American?"

"Yonder somewhere, excellency," said Roleau, pointing toward the palace.

"Well, well, Sachio!" demanded that monarch, testily, "You have on your face now the same look which I have learned to know. But surely you have not failed. Come, let me see it."

"I cannot, your majesty. It is gone!"

"Gone? Yet you had it?"

"Yes, your majesty. Both halves—I had them both. You yourself gave them in my keeping on the field. I was responsible for them, that is true. But, see here where I hid them—everything is empty now. They have been taken away by someone. And who could have known of it?"

A silence fell upon the disconcerted group who stood about the king.

"Stay!" added Sachio a little later. "There was a man, a prisoner, who was brought to me just before our retreat began—the man named Roleau, the spy."

"Find that man!" said Cortislaw, coldly, turning a savage eye upon Sachio.

The prisoners taken by the Gretzhoffen men, more by chance than plan in their own tempestuous retreat, had been grouped under loose guard in the rear compound of the Gretzhoffen palace. It was with them that Roleau had been confined. Thither Count Sachio now turned his steps. Hastily he inquired of this officer and that, of this prisoner and that. At length he resigned the search.

Once more the spy Roleau had escaped!

### CHAPTER LVI.

#### By Land and Sea.

In the confusion which followed the retreat of the Gretzhoffen troops upon their own capital, Roleau found himself swept away from the officer who first had taken him in charge.

Roleau, not unused to scenes of violence, had himself well in hand, and now studied his situation calmly, finding it somewhat to his own advantage.



The Army of Gretzhoffen in Action.

"Take him away, lieutenant, and keep him safe until I call for him."

It was thus that Roleau remained for a time unobserved, but was ultimately caught in the general rout of King Cortislaw's armies. It was night when finally the rout ended under the walls of Gretzhoffen itself.

Cortislaw was an old man when he had started out that day. Since morning he had aged yet a dozen years. Nothing was left to him! The end of his life's dream was at hand.

"Curses upon all things!" exclaimed old Cortislaw, at last, sweeping a level glance under his bushy gray brows at his courtiers. "Once more they have proved too much for us. It was my one remaining chance."

None dared raise a voice against the wrath of the broken king. After a time, he went on:

"What use, then, Count Sachio, was their coin, after all? We had it, and we lost it."

"Count Frederick told me, your majesty," began Sachio, "that what we had was only a counterfeit. He said he gave it to the king of Gretzhoffen in a bit of deceit for purposes of his own. It read the same—that I may be sworn. Its errand should have been the same. But as to our victory—look, it was counterfeit."

"Yes," said Cortislaw, slowly, "count that not for us, but against us. I say the cursed coin is bewitched—it is in the service of Gretzhoffen, not our own. It is the evil spirit of our own kingdom, that I will be sworn."

"But," said Count Sachio, after a time, "the end never is till all is done. True, we have failed at arms, your majesty, but after all, that does not affect the existence of the Gretzhoffen treasure. I myself have been in that room. I have been beneath the walls—I know the very place where that secret is concealed. Look, we have all the coin—and even if this half is counterfeit, their half, the true half though it be, is no more than half. They cannot read the riddle of their own treasure, and yet we know it! Who, then, has won this battle? Riches are needful for any king. Without the secret which we ourselves hold, what may they hope? No, not all is yet lost, your majesty!"

The old king turned upon him his burning eye. "Count Sachio," said he, "you have disappointed me time and again regarding yonder coin; yet after all, of all my noblemen, you have been the most successful, for surely you brought to us the secret. That is true. At one time we had all the coin. Long we have had half the coin. Today we held it all in our possession, and we still hold it. Bring me the coin. I want to examine both halves once more with my own eyes."

"It is well, your majesty. I will go get both halves, we will compare them."

Count Sachio hastened to the room where on his return from the battlefield he had changed his dusty apparel. His tunic and trousers lay where he had left them. Evidently his orderly had fled.

Count Sachio took up the trousers and thrust a hand into a pocket. He knew where he had kept the coin, in his little leather folding portemonnaie. But he withdrew his hand and looked at it curiously. The blank look on his face remained as he felt quickly in other pockets of the same garment, as he searched nervously through every pocket of the tunic which he had discarded, red with dust and blood. Still his hand came out empty of that which he sought.

When Count Sachio returned to his king he was in deep pallor; consternation sat on his face.

He saw that he now had better opportunity for escape than at any time before.

Resolved at last, he slipped away beyond his guards, and made off through the city, not to the westward toward the plain which lay between the two cities, but to the east where lay the water front of Gretzhoffen.

The desert which lay between these two little kingdoms ran far down to the southward in a barren peninsula, on either side of which swept the blue sea. Each kingdom, therefore, might be said to have a seaport as good as the other, although that of Gretzhoffen lay closer to the Mediterranean proper. Nevertheless the Gretzhoffen harbor was an ample one, and here all the tiny navy of the little kingdom lay—beyond the aviation grounds where the scanty corps of that service sometimes held their maneuvers.

As may be seen, each of these little kingdoms, jealous of the other, and rivaling methods of richer empires than their own, had developed as best it could each branch of the service approved in modern warfare. Each had its little corps of air craft, each its miniature navy, its submarines, its destroyers.

Full details of all this Roleau did not know. He knew well enough, none the less, that escape for him lay by water and not by land. He dared not essay the long journey across the late fought field. Once upon the sea, he would leave no trail. Therefore he must find some craft to carry him safe around the great peninsula and so back to Gretzhoffen.

It was night when he approached the wharves along the Gretzhoffen harbor front. At their anchorage lay the dim gray hulks of the few battleships belonging to Cortislaw. At one of the docks signs of activity attracted him. A yacht, a long, clean-lined vessel, a thoroughbred in all details, beautifully equipped and apparently well manned and officered, was getting ready to set out. Roleau looked at it closely. It bore the royal ensign. In truth, it was none less than the yacht of royalty itself.

"Good-morrow, sir," said Roleau to the captain of the yacht, before whom he presented himself a little later. "I see you are setting out. Would you take a passenger, one as anxious as yourself to leave this place?"

The captain looked at this intruder for a moment with none too much favor.

"This boat is not for charter," said he. "We are leaving, it is true, but we offer no passage for the public."

"Nor am I under charter for the public," rejoined Roleau, calmly. "I am in high service. None the less, I am ready to pay for transportation from this place. I am careless where you may be sailing. Ask me not too many questions, and I will not in-

quire of you, my dear captain, why you are now sailing with the king's yacht."

This bold chance thrust went home. Roleau suspected now that the captain was sailing under orders of his own and for reasons of his own. The man hesitated now.

"Well, then," said he, at length, "we have room, that is true. But as to refugees—"

"Call me no refugee!" said Roleau, firmly. "I tell you, I am on business of importance, and care little where you go, save only that you take me hence, I can pay."

By this time Roleau was aboard. The captain neither welcomed him nor repulsed him. He only shrugged his shoulders, and accepted some coins which Roleau placed in his hand.

### CHAPTER LVII.

#### By Air and Water.

Roleau awakened at dawn. The ripple of water was in his ears. The yacht was under way.

Soon it was out of earshot of all that went forward at the wharves. None aboard might know what meant the little group of men who hurried here and there along the water front, giving this order and that.

"In the king's name!" one man cried.

It was, indeed, in the king's name, for now, shallow though was his disguise, none less than Cortislaw had joined Sachio in this last pursuit of the evasive coins. Hurried inquiry had convinced Sachio that Roleau had made his escape in this direction. It was by guess rather than by proof that he fancied his late prisoner was yonder on the king's yacht, passing down the harbor.

As for Cortislaw, he raged.

"It is nothing, your majesty," rejoined the dauntless Count Sachio. "All is not ended till all is done. We shall not let them evade us. Come, we have craft of our own. Here are some of our fast boats. Would your majesty dare the submarine?"

"I dare anything that another man dare," rejoined Cortislaw savagely. "Quick, then—order the first boat ready."

Now in truth the nobleman and his sovereign were to embark in a novel undertaking. The long, slim, fish-nosed craft, with its upright periscope, received

along the water front—and now far down the great arm of the sea which thrust up from the south.

"Your majesty," said Count Sachio at length, laying down the glasses with which he had been examining the ship of the air which passed above them, "I was wrong! At first I thought some leader of their aviation corps had developed this raid today, but it is not so. I told you that Count Frederick was dead. My eyes must have deceived me. It is he, yonder! He himself is guiding this pursuit. With him there is another—a woman, your majesty! It is none less than the young American, who has been the most dangerous enemy we yet have met. They two—for what reason I am not informed—are aloft together. Their purpose I can only guess."

The rage of Cortislaw now was such as left him silent. He simply glared from one man to the other.

"Your majesty," said Count Sachio at last "It must be as your majesty reasons. But it is by sinking yonder craft, not by saving it, that he can most hurt us. Yes, I am convinced, yonder is the coin. How they know it—how they guess it, I do not know. More than once it would seem to me that intuition rather than knowledge has guided them in their plans. I say that yonder coin is bewitched and always fights for Gretzhoffen and not for us."

The chase went on, and now under such curious relations as left the three vessels of the surface, of the subsurface and of the air, drifting along, none taking the offensive.

But though the giant air craft followed close, seeming ever to hold the yacht at its mercy, it made no offensive movement; it seemed rather to shelter than to menace the fleeing vessel which steamed on so gallantly. And in the rear of both, helpless, impotent, with speed and naught but speed at its disposal, came the submarine of Cortislaw and his nobleman. Thus neither of the three could or would hurt another.

But Sachio's guess had been right. The governing influence in Gretzhoffen affairs scarce was so much reason as instinct, intuition—a woman's intuition. For he had been right—a woman was aloft, yonder with the pilot of the air craft.

"It is a curious chase, mademoiselle," said Count Frederick, turning to the companion at his side and speaking so that his voice could be heard above the loud drone of the engines. "What have we gained? What do we know?"

In turn she pointed below, where the gray line of the submarine could be seen plunging forward.

"Look!" said she. "Look at them below us yonder. They want what we want. They pursue what we pursue. Why? Believe me, they know that the coin is on ahead. If they know it, why shouldn't we? monsieur le comte, your ride this morning was an inspiration. The accident of following what might have been the wake of a fish, but was the flash of submarine—the accident of seeing yonder cloud smoke ahead—that was fate fighting with us. I believe me, Roleau is yonder on that boat! Believe me, he has the coin. Fate is fighting with us at last. The end of all our troubles is at hand."

As they swept forward, now near, now dropping off from the course of the speeding yacht, a Kitty turned her glass upon the decks of the craft. At length she exclaimed:

"It is he! I see him. He is there, standing in the back. He has no glass. He cannot recognize now. But it is he. Ah! trust yonder faithful not to be traveling in vain. I am sure, as though I saw it, that he has the coin with him there. I am sure, as though I saw him, that it is Count Sachio himself in yonder submarine pursuing him. Count Literally, we must fly."

And fly they did. Moment after moment, hour after hour, until at length the smoke above Gretzhoffen harbor thickened, until the towers of the cathedrals and the palace appeared, until the ship pling grew more distinct, until the long green slope of the coast fortifications showed to the eyes of Count Frederick, high above the level of the sea.

"We will make it safely, mademoiselle," said Count Frederick, at last. "For some reason the submarine does not attack, I do not know why. The three of us soon will be within reach of our own guns. I wonder—"

The wonder of Count Frederick was not ill placed. In a few moments they heard the dull report of a 30-centimeter piece of one of the coast batteries—saw the white cloud of smoke burst from the emplacement in front of the disappearing gun. On ahead they saw the white splash of the shell across the bows of the advancing yacht.

"What do they mean?" exclaimed Count Frederick. "Ah, I see. The yacht carries the ensign of the royal navy of Gretzhoffen! It is armed. Our gunners take it for an enemy. Now heaven send them bad aim for once!"

A shot, and yet another followed, bracketing the yacht between the ranges. Count Frederick held his breath for what he knew would come. Come it did. The yacht, struck full by the impact of a heavy shell, reeled, careened, half broke apart and began to settle to the head.

"It is too bad!" exclaimed Count Frederick; "sunk by our own men! Yonder yacht was coming to our harbor for protection, carrying our own man—carrying our own fortune—the Gretzhoffen coin! And now all is lost!"

He turned the prow of the air craft full toward the settling yacht. The wake of the submarine was no longer visible. It had taken cover when the artillery fire began.

Then, what the men of the Gretzhoffen batteries saw—that the men of the submarine might have seen—was the swift vplane of the air craft which they so long had followed. It swept down now like a giant bird, at a keen angle, as though itself would dip into the sea. Below it there swept the great anchor rope, its end whipping white here and there on the tops of the waves.

"Ahoy, Roleau!" cried the voice of Count Frederick.

Roleau looked up at this summons from the clouds, and saw above the rail of the air craft no so long had noted in wonder two faces that he knew and loved! A great sob shook his giant chest. Even his callous soul was affected. Out of the very deep they had come—his master and his mistress—to save him, when he thought all was lost! He lifted up his hands.

The whipping rope coiled and turned, twisted this way and that. But the steady hand at the rudder of the air craft guided it straight onward, downward.

Roleau reached out, made a swift grasp, felt himself swept free, off his feet. An instant later, hand over hand, he began his ascent from what had been the extremest peril of his life.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)